

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRB #1013/01 3631654
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 291654Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1003
INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 0032

UNCLAS RABAT 001013

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KPAO](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH MINISTER OF
ISLAMIC AFFAIRS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador met with Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs Ahmed Toufiq on Dec. 8. In substantive and open talks, they discussed U.S.-Moroccan cooperation and the GOM's efforts to promote moderate Islam. Toufiq emphasized Morocco's role as a moderate force in the region and his ministry's role in ensuring a unified, non-radical message in local mosques. He also posited that budget constraints pose the biggest challenge for his Ministry. End Summary.

Working with the U.S.

¶2. (SBU) Minister of Endowments (Habous) and Islamic Affairs Ahmed Toufiq opened the meeting by expressing his desire for the U.S. and Morocco to work constructively towards stability and moderation in the Arab and Islamic world. He opined that Moroccans did not understand Americans well and suggested that the two countries should work to promote greater understanding. The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MOEIA) as well as the King were involved in promoting justice in Morocco, which he explained is a main tenet of Islam as well as of democracy. Morocco and the U.S. could also work together in other ways, he suggested. Morocco is "not just another country in the Maghreb; it has a specific role to play" in reducing conflicts, and is one of only two or three countries in the region that can do so. In a subtle critique, Toufiq said he wanted the U.S. to understand better the importance of its relationship with Morocco, and for U.S. analysis of Morocco to be "deep" and focused on the long-term. Over the next five to ten years, "things will not be easy for anyone" in the region, he said, and, therefore, "we all need to work together for peace and stability."

¶3. (SBU) In reference to the divergent experiences of Morocco and Algeria in dealing with extremism, Toufiq noted Morocco's "luck" in having a different history from Algeria's, and asserted that "our neighbors are trying to copy (the moderation) we have here." He acknowledged the deep distrust and nearly complete lack of cooperation between Algeria and Morocco, but described the two countries, current relationship as just a temporary "moment" of estrangement.

¶4. (SBU) Emphasizing the unique and moderate nature of Moroccan Islam, Toufiq alluded to GOM concerns about the negative influence of external Islamic ideas. Noting the GOM's desire to build a Moroccan mosque in Washington, D.C., he said "our people are like aliens among other Muslim communities" in the U.S.

Promoting Moderate Islam

¶5. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's comment on separation of church and state in the U.S., Toufiq stated unequivocally that it is impossible to make a clear distinction between "mosque" and state in Islam. He explained that if the political leader is not also religious, people will be "expecting the mahdi" and will be "open to revolt." It is necessary to assure people that everything political falls within the framework of religious fundamentals, he said, and the King has to be seen to be engaged in the process of justice.

¶6. (SBU) Toufiq elaborated on the GOM's top-down efforts to control mosques and imams and to ensure a moderate version of Islam in the country. He explained that the King had used royal decrees to create laws and define Islam in Morocco. One of the major changes the MOEIA had initiated under his leadership was creation of regional chiefs or delegates for each of Morocco's 69 -- and soon to be more than 80 -- administrative regions. These delegates are charged with managing operations of Morocco's 47,000 mosques and councils of Ulema and with directing instruction in Koranic schools and for imams. In addition to regulating instruction, the regional councils of Ulema have taken on other projects, such as literacy programs for up to 200,000 people per year. He showed the Ambassador the MOEIA's "Guide for Imams," clarifying that imams are employees of the state; while they may receive money from their communities, they also receive government stipends. He stressed that it was not enough to have security forces and an army but that the GOM also needed "to have the religious people on our side."

Challenges

¶7. (SBU) In response to the ambassador's question about problems facing MOEIA efforts, Toufiq highlighted a small budget as the biggest challenge. He explained that 60 percent of mosques in Morocco are built by non-governmental organizations and communities. However, if communities want to run their mosques once they are constructed, they must conform to the rules. The GOM will "not allow imams to use the pulpit for propaganda or politics," he stated. Despite the MOEIA's top-down approach, Toufiq expressed hope that one day the GOM could return responsibility for mosques to communities.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Moro> cco

KAPLAN